



## Mc DOUGALL'S GOOD STORIES FOR CHILDREN



### How a Small Boy First Met the Rambillicus and Destroyed the Bad Goon

### Denny, the Rambillicus and the Skeewink Try to Decide How to Escape



LITTLE Denny's father was a flagman on the railroad, and they lived in a little shanty right beside the track, so that Denny's father could run out at any time to warn passersby that a train was coming. The flagman had only one arm, the other having been cut off by the wheels of a car, and people used to ask Denny where his father's other arm was just to hear him reply that it was in Heaven.

Denny thought that anything that was buried must, of course, be in Heaven, and that was what had happened to his father's arm, buried in a box in the cemetery.

Denny's bed was in a box, too, right beneath the bench upon which the flagman slept during his short naps.

Denny went to school in the little red school-house on the turnpike, a mile away, and he was probably the one boy in the school who enjoyed studying lessons. His life was not so very interesting at the shanty that he was loath to leave it. In fact, school was to Denny the most interesting place he had ever seen, so far.

Vacation meant merely a long period during which he learned very little from books and had to depend upon himself for amusement, for nearly every boy and girl in the school went away at that time, and the little village was nearly deserted.

All of the people in Barrettsburg were wealthy; they nearly all went to Europe or Atlantic City in the summer time, but Denny never went anywhere except to the woods or the creek to take a lonely swim in the muddy stream.

Poor Denny knew nothing about fairies, elves or gnomes, else he might have often imagined himself in the haunts of the little people when he found himself in the dim woodland hiding-places of the fox and the hare, where, as everybody knows, the fairies always dwell; but as his father was a peculiar man, and rarely spoke, Denny had never heard any fairy tales at all.

Yet to this lonely boy befell as marvelous a happening as could come to the lad best acquainted with fairy tale people.

In the first place, Barrettsburg was visited by the Goon. You never heard of a Goon, perhaps, and mainly because his name never appeared in the papers, for the reporters all united in keeping his dreadful deeds secret, as it was thought his appearance, just at the beginning of a national campaign, might excite alarm and bring on hard times, thus causing the election of the candidate opposed to prosperity.

So the Goon ravaged an immense section of country without the rest of the land knowing anything about him, except what the reporters chose to tell their friends in whispers, and even they had never really set eyes on the awful monster.

A few very poor photographs had been taken from a great distance of the creature, but they were not very plain and therefore there was every possible difference in the descriptions given out of the Goon's appearance.

When it was known that the Goon was heading for Barrettsburg and slowly approaching that wealthy village there was great alarm.

The creature devoured almost everything; but it was, of course, fondest of hay, wheat, rye, oats and other cereals, but, also, its strange and abnormal appetite caused it to hungrily gobble up coal, wood, and even garments that were hung on the clothes lines! A wash hung out flapping in the wind was an invitation and a temptation that took the Goon many a mile out of its way, and a coal-yard full of coal made it linger for hours until it had been cleaned up to the last delicious morsel.

Thus it was in the habit of following along the line of a railroad watching for the passing coal trains, which it stopped and emptied, car after car, and when at last no more arrived it slowly moved

on in its search for food. Trees and fences, barns and houses, haystacks and crops, all vanished before it as if a fire had passed over the land, and nothing but the homeless, hungry people were left.

Barrettsburg was full of grain, lumber, coal; and in its mill cotton in heaps, while in the rubber factory were millions of rubber boots, coats and the like, which, it was very well known, was what the Goon liked the best.

Farmers drove hurriedly into town with wagons loaded with produce which they hoped to hide away in the market; in the fields men dug great pits and buried their precious store of grain or coal and the like.

Now, of course, there was nothing doing on the railroad, for the wrecks of coal cars stopped all traffic, and therefore Denny's father had nothing to do but sleep, and he slept. Little cared he for the Goon! He laughed when Denny asked him about it, and said:

"Faith, my boy, you know more about the creature than I do. If he comes he can't do more than he has done, as far as I am concerned. Sure, he's put the railroad out of business, but that's no concern o' mine. My pay goes on unless the railroad busts up. Wait till he comes, and I'll tell ye all about him."

But Denny couldn't wait. He wanted to see the Goon, and when all other people were hurrying away from the creature he resolved to go and meet it. He had heard that it had never harmed human beings, and therefore he saw nothing to dread.

Denny packed up a small supply of food, enough to last him several days, as well as a big bottle of water, for he had heard of the Goon's thirst and didn't expect to find a spring flowing in the region he was going to visit, and early in the morning he started off.

He met many people hastening to town, all of whom asked him where he was going and warmly advised him to turn back, a thing he had little mind for, I assure you, for he became more and more eager to see the monster the nearer he came to the scene of his ravages. But after a time he met no more people; all had fled from the region.

And here he came to two roads, either of which might lead him to the Goon, but he couldn't tell which was the right road to take. There were no signs as yet of the dread monster; all was silent and peaceful, nothing noisier than a robin disturbing the stillness.

Climbing a tall tree Denny saw far in the distance a line of low hills crowned with trees, and he concluded to follow the road to the right in the hope that it would lead to the woods, where he really believed the Goon might be seen.

Now, in fact, he took exactly the opposite direction from that in which the Goon was moving, and he traveled as fast as he could walk away from the monster. In another day he was climbing the wooded hills, and next morning he looked down into a lovely, peaceful valley through which a silver stream, clear as a diamond, rippled beneath fruit trees and palms along flowery banks.

As he strolled along he saw coconuts, bananas, oranges, dates, figs and all manner of delicious fruits growing overhead, while strawberries and pineapples simply covered the ground.

Here grew roast peanuts! There he espied a bush bearing cookies! Springs of lemonade gushed from crystal basins and lay in shining pools of pink loveliness! Chewing-gum pods stuck out from tree trunks! Caramels hung from stalks, and strings of taffy from boughs overhead! Popcorn balls grew like mushrooms in the grass! Flowers that resembled sunflowers held pies in their centres! Cinnamon buns grew in gnarled lumps and bunches on the rocks like moss in an ordinary wood! Peppermint drops clung to the edges of daisy-like petals puffing in the soft breeze! Coconut cakes in giant clusters stood on the tops of tall stems!

"Oh, where am I?" exclaimed Denny, in wonder; for, not having ever read any fairy tales, he of course could have no idea of what had happened. You or I would have instantly concluded that we had fallen into fairyland or into some bewitched country.

He was afraid to taste any of the wonderful things he saw about him, for he was an honest lad and he thought, naturally, that all these dainties belonged to somebody who valued them very much.

At last he decided to eat his lunch, and with all these dainties growing so profusely about him this honest lad sat down and ate his dry bread!

Yet all this time an eye watchful and keen had been on him, and he was followed by a silent-footed spy, who, with great astonishment, observed that Denny had not tasted a single fruit or bit of candy during all this time.

This silent watcher was the fat, merry Skeewink; but perhaps you may not know what the Skeewink is!

He looks exactly like an immense raccoon, striped and glossy, with twinkling eyes and white teeth. When he saw Denny eating dry bread he slipped out from the bushes and stood beside the boy. Denny started in surprise, for he thought this was the Goon. The Skeewink said:

"Boy, what do you here in our woods?"

"I am looking 'round," replied Denny, anxious not to offend the creature. "I ain't going to do any harm, Mr. Goon!"

"I am not Mr. Goon, whoever that is," said the Skeewink. "I am called by another name. I am the Skeewink."

"Ah, then, I am all right!" thought Denny. "Excuse me," he added, aloud, "I thought you were the animal that's eating up everything all over the country."

"What's that?" cried the Skeewink. "Eating up everything! Tell me about it!"

Denny told him all about the Goon, and then the Skeewink cried, excitedly:

"But we must hasten and let the Rambillicus know about this! The Goon may happen upon this place at any moment, and my! what a disaster that will be!"

"But pray, who is the Rambillicus?" inquired Denny.

Then the Skeewink sat down and told Denny all about Benevolent Rambillicus, who keeps the Perennial Picnic Grounds for Good Children, where every boy and girl who has the luck to be found either by Rambillicus or jolly old Skeewink, his assistant, spends many happy days after school is closed.

Denny listened in amazement to hear of the wonderful makeup of Rambillicus; how he has a whole soda-fountain at his side, with cups hanging by chains, his cupboards full of pies, cakes and other goodies, his banana toes, his inside theatre, rifle gallery, doll-house and merry-go-round and his aerial refreshment airship things which may or may not be perfectly familiar to you, but which to the startled Denny were beyond all imagination.

"This valley is where the Rambillicus grows all the good things with which he treats his children," said the Skeewink, looking around. "You are quite at liberty to eat anything you like," he added. "I don't suppose any boy was ever here before, but that don't make any difference."

While Denny was eating—and you may be sure he missed nothing—the Skeewink added to his information regarding the Rambillicus, that lovely animal loaded to the muzzle with doughnuts, pickles, doll-house and merry-go-round and his aerial refreshment airship things which may or may not be perfectly familiar to you, but which to the startled Denny were beyond all imagination.

"I'd love to see him once!" exclaimed the boy. "You shall see him, my son," said the Skeewink. "For I must hasten to him and warn him of the danger that may threaten us in this Goon you tell about!"

"Perhaps the Goon may not come this way," suggested Denny, loath to leave the delightful spot. "Nevertheless we must warn Ram, or we will be to blame. Follow me," said the Skeewink.

Denny rose and followed him, until at last he saw the dear old Rambillicus standing beneath a tree listening to the songs of a number of children in the grass. Denny was amazed.

The animal somewhat resembled a hippopotamus, but with what a difference! Several doors leading to apartments within showed on his side, a spiral stairway was revealed in his hind leg through one open door, and a toboggan slide descended from his back, while a balloon was suspended over him in which were several children!

Denny pinched himself to see if he were awake or merely dreaming, and then the Rambillicus saw him. The Skeewink promptly told him about the Goon, and it was quite pitiful to see the tender-hearted Rambillicus droop just like a great wilted cabbage! He trembled, and finally said in a thin, weak voice:

"Oh my poor, dear children! I felt it in my bones that something was going to happen. Oh, what shall we do?"

"Let's go away!" cried the Skeewink.

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed the boy. "Nonsense! You don't get me away from all this sport until I am sure he's coming, and even then I won't hurry."

"Go and play with the other boys," said the Rambillicus, "while we talk it all over and try to decide what to do."

So Denny hastened away, and for a long time enjoyed himself as he had never done before, with games which he had never heard of and toys he had never before seen; but at last the two animals called him, and he went to them to find them both with woe-begone faces.

"We are completely at a loss!" cried the Rambillicus. "Skeewink, usually so quick to invent a game or a new amusement, now is really quite stupid with fear, and I confess I am almost as bad!"

"Well, I'll tell you what to do. Let Skeewink go scouting off in the direction I came from and see what he can discover, for if the Goon isn't coming this way we needn't be alarmed at all!"

"That's a good idea!" cried the Skeewink, and without another word he shot away, with his striped tail aloft in the air. In a couple of hours he returned to say that the Goon was rapidly eating his way toward Barrettsburg and never would trouble them at all.

But now Denny began to worry, for he knew that rich, prosperous Barrettsburg couldn't stand a visit from the Goon without disaster following, and at last he told his friends that he must return home at once.

"But what good can you do?" asked the Skeewink. "You are but a mere boy."

"I don't know that I can do anything, but I want to be near my father. I wish I could get there to-night!"

"You can if you follow the railroad, which passes very near here," said the Skeewink. Then he led Denny through a thick wood that concealed the Perennial Picnic Grounds from view, and there was the railroad! So Denny said good-by, promised to return and hastened away.

When he arrived near town he found hundreds of people along the road, all weeping bitterly, for already the Goon had arrived at the great lake from which they got their city water and had drunk up every drop! Children were crying already for water! Then he heard that it had devoured all the

coal and was now eating up the lumber yards to the north of the town!

Then the Board of Aldermen came along, and President Mulock cried aloud in a voice full of agony:

"A thousand—yes, five thousand dollars out of my own pocket, in cash, to the man who saves us from this awful peril!"

Denny's father, who happened along just then, caught the boy by the shoulder and squeezed him with joy.

"Faith, if we had that we'd never have to flag another train!"

Suddenly a great idea came into Denny's mind.

"Father," said he, in a whisper. "Father, do you suppose we could get a locomotive?"

"Sure, that's easy enough! There's seven of them resting idle in the roundhouse! But what do you want with a locomotive? Sure, why not wish for one of them antimobiles?"

"Could you run a locomotive?" asked Denny.

"Could I run a locomotive? Wasn't I a fireman on one for ten years, and a good one, too. Sure, I can!"

"Then we are saved!" cried Denny. "Now follow me as fast as you can, and we will get a locomotive!"

In a few minutes they were spinning down the road, and soon the locomotive was hauling a long train of oil-tank cars off to the great empty lake from which the Goon had drunk all the water.

Then Denny and his father allowed all the oil to flow from the tanks until all were empty, after which they went back for more. By night the lake was almost half-full of clear kerosene oil, and many people were standing along its banks wondering what it all meant, but Denny, even then, was not willing to tell what he was going to do.

By nightfall half of Barrettsburg's wealth had been eaten up and every drop of water was gone, but the Goon was as thirsty as ever and rampaging around in a dreadful manner after some liquid refreshment.

Then, when at last it turned its red eyes toward the lake of oil it leaped for joy and sprang toward it, making a horrible, gurgling sound.

In a few minutes it had swallowed every drop of the oil and returned to devour the contents of Colonel Potter's oilcloth factory, which was quite an accidental combination, of course, but very appropriate and suitable.

Its great rounded sides seemed bursting as it stopped beside the factory gate and made goo goo eyes into the windows. In fact, it was simply oozing kerosene oil as it walked, and then came Denny's opportunity!

He slipped up beside its shining tail, took out a match, struck it on the seat of his trousers and then laid it against the Goon's skin!

Instantly an immense flame shot up! In fact, Denny had scarce time to leap away and avoid being singed, so quickly did the Goon burst into flame. The whole animal was in a blaze at once.

The enormous, caterpillar-like monster squirmed and roared, but the fire roared louder, while the people cheered Denny and sang songs of joy, until at last the great fire was burned away, leaving nothing but black ashes to show that once an animal called the Goon had existed.

It was morning by that time, and all the people, headed by Aldermen Mulock, had formed a vast procession and marched down to the bank, where Denny was paid the five thousand dollars amid tumultuous cheers that made his old father shed tears of joy.

So that's how Barrettsburg was saved, and how Denny got the money that took him through college; and if I had time I could tell you many another tale of his visits to old Rambillicus, but now I must make an end.

WALT McDOUGALL.